

MINUTES OF SPECIAL VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
ORIGINATING AT THE CASS COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
WEST FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA
AND ON LOCATION AT THE RED RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT BOARD
OFFICE
ADA, MINNESOTA
JUNE 15, 2022

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call meeting on June 15, 2022, at 9:00 a.m.

Participating were John Finney, Gary Thompson, Greg Holmvik, Rodger Olson, Bill Petersen, Dan Jacobson (alternate for Ben Varnson), Board members; Theresa Ebbenga, Pat Fridgen and Ted Preister, non-voting members; Keith Weston, Executive Director; Carol Harbeke Lewis, Secretary-Treasurer; Nina Stone, Accountant; Melissa Maertens, Administrative Assistant; Mary Podoll, Rita Harmsen-Sveen and Cassie Ahmed, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Rob Sip, Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB); John Voz, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources; Zach Herrmann, Houston Engineering, Inc.; Pat Downs, Moore Engineering, Inc.; Morrie Lanning, Barr Engineering Co.; Blake Carlson, Widseth, Smith, Nolting; and William A. Hejl, Rush River Water Resource District. Board member Ben Varnson was absent.

Gary Thompson called the meeting to order and introductions were made.

Agenda

It was moved by John Finney, seconded by Bill Petersen and unanimously carried to approve the order of the agenda.

Minutes

It was moved by Dan Jacobson, seconded by Greg Holmvik and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the March 16, 2022, meeting.

Financial Report

It was moved by John Finney, seconded by Rodger Olson and unanimously carried to approve the Financial Report, as presented.

Bills

It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Bill Petersen to approve the wire transfers, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

2021 Audit

The Secretary-Treasurer briefly reported the 2021 Audit was finished, but the report was not ready yet. Approval of the final 2021 Audit will be considered at a future meeting.

2023 Budget

It was moved by John Finney and seconded by Greg Holmvik to approve the RRRRA 2023 budget. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

NRCS report

Rita Harmsen-Sveen updated the Board on Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) watershed and flood preventions operations. The NRCS received an overwhelming response for the Emergency Watershed Protection program with the flooding conditions this year.

Ms. Harmsen-Sveen next discussed the ongoing dam rehabilitation plans and reported on the status of the 6 active RCPP Watershed Plans in North Dakota. The Tongue River Watershed Plan and North Branch Park River Watershed Plan have been sent to the National Watershed Management Center for review. The Upper Maple River Watershed Plan has requested an exception to the benefit-cost ratio for the Plan. The Rush River Watershed Plan has been authorized by the Chief at the National Watershed Management Center and project design is on schedule to be completed by September 2022. The Shortfoot Creek Watershed Plan and the North Branch Antelope Watershed Plan are currently working on maximizing environmental benefits.

Discussion was held on the erosion that occurred at Bourbanis Dam this spring. The Board stated they hope to see water storage retained at Bourbanis Dam or additional on-channel storage incorporated at Herzog Dam or other facilities downstream.

It was moved by Bill Petersen and seconded by Dan Jacobson to direct the Executive Director to communicate with Pembina County Water Resource District, Cavalier County Water Resource District and the NRCS that the RRRRA is supportive of the local efforts regarding Bourbanis Dam and the RRRRA hopes the current level of retention at Bourbanis Dam is maintained. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Rodger Olson discussed potentially drafting a policy that includes sentiments that the RRRRA wishes to retain storage in the Red River Basin but fully supports local watershed districts and water resource districts regarding retention at their facilities in the Red River Basin. The Board directed the Executive Director to draft a policy to that effect for review at a future meeting.

Cassie Ahmed reported Minnesota NRCS is working with private property owners in the Red River Basin in Minnesota to provide funds for impacts due to flooding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The first application deadline for the Program is June 17, 2022, with priority given for structural, existing, and new conservation

practices due to excessive runoff, though any conservation practice is eligible to apply. The Minnesota NRCS hopes to have funds obligated for the Program by August with funds being spent by property owners within 90 days. The second application deadline is July 15, 2022. Ms. Ahmed stated \$4,000,000 is available in the program. Brief discussion was held on potential disaster funding related to ring dikes.

Ms. Ahmed reported Lance Smith will be attending future RRRRA meetings to provide the Minnesota NRCS update. Mr. Smith is the NRCS Minnesota Assistant State Conservationist – Field Operations, located in Detroit Lakes, MN.

Zach Herrmann provided more information on the hydrology of Bourbanis Dam and the surrounding area and stated water storage could potentially be consolidated at Herzog Dam or optimized at Bourbanis Dam to ensure comparable or increased flood protection benefits. In the near-term, the Pembina County Water Resource District needs to modify Bourbanis Dam to remove risk to the downstream public.

Outreach – public service ads and announcements

Keith Weston updated the Board on current and recent commercials played on KFGO radio, including a commercial on the success story of flood protection for the City of Warren, Minnesota. Mr. Weston indicated he is also working with KTRF radio in Thief River Falls to reach more listeners in the Red River Basin. Project sponsors that want to feature a project on a radio commercial should contact Mr. Weston for more details.

Office space

Mr. Weston reported the architect for the proposed remodel and potential expansion at the Cass County Highway Department reached out to inquire if the RRRRA is interested in office space at the Cass County Highway Department. Ted Preister reported he has also spoken to the architect and the cost estimate for the project is significantly more expensive than the cost of office space the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC) currently occupies that sublets office space to the RRRRA. Mr. Preister indicated the RRBC is not planning to move unless the cost of the new space were to be subsidized. The Board discussed the matter and indicated they are not interested in relocating the office at this time; however, if other water-related groups such as the NDDWR Red River Office, RRBC or IWI co-locate within Cass County offices, the RRRRA will revisit the topic.

Strategic Plan – Legislative committee

Mr. Weston indicated the committee previously formed to discuss legislative involvement of the RRRRA will be meeting later this summer to further discuss the matter.

2022 Red River Basin tour

Mr. Weston discussed the 2022 Red River Basin tour on August 24, 2022. The tour begins in Grand Forks and will include various stops in the Red River Basin such as the Drayton Dam and the City of Warren diversion. The tour will be approximately 7 hours in length and will be a tremendous opportunity for education and outreach. Also included in the events are meetings and presentations on August 23, 2022, and a workshop on

August 25, 2022. Rob Sip suggested the RRRRA invite radio stations to broadcast from the event using funds from the outreach budget. The Board directed the Executive Director to utilize funds from the outreach budget to invite radio stations on the 2022 Red River Basin tour. Mr. Sip noted the tour registration should be open next week and he will be coordinating with three radio stations regarding broadcasting on-location during the three-day event.

Minnesota and North Dakota state funding needs

Discussion was held on funding needs for flood damage reduction and retention projects in the Red River Basin. Mr. Weston suggesting drafting a policy regarding the matter and inviting North Dakota and Minnesota Governors to a meeting with RRRRA, Red River Joint Water Resource District (RRJWRD) and RRWMB representatives to discuss funding for flood damage reduction and retention projects in North Dakota and Minnesota. Mr. Sip stated consistent funding is needed to complete projects that project sponsors have invested time and money into. Pat Fridgen reported the State Water Commission is considering changes to their cost-share policy; however, there have been no modifications to retention policies in the recent past and there will be a positive change to the policy for projects with federal funding. Mr. Fridgen also stated the NDDWR 2023-2025 Water Development Plan will be available by July 1, 2022. Brief discussion was held on potential State Water Commission cost-share for federally authorized projects with an exception to the benefit-cost ratio that receive cost-share from NRCS. More discussion on funding needs for retention and flood damage reduction projects in the Red River Basin will be held at a future meeting.

RRWMB legislative and project update

Mr. Sip reported the RRWMB received \$360,000 in funding for construction of ring dikes. The RRWMB plans to partner with the NRCS and other cost-share partners as well as utilizing local RRWMB funding to construct as many ring dikes as possible. Mr. Sip noted some Watershed Districts will also be receiving funds for habitat restoration.

Agency and partner reports

Theresa Ebbenga reported on recent updates of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). The MDNR is assisting communities experiencing damages from flooding and tornadoes. Ms. Ebbenga also discussed a round table event hosted by the MDNR recently. At the round table event, a video was shared of the first known spawning of sturgeon in Minnesota in over 100 years, which is a significant event for fishing enthusiasts and conservationists.

Mr. Fridgen reported the NDDWR will be hosting meetings this summer to discuss and solicit feedback on potential updates to the State Water Commission cost-share policy. The 45-day comment period on the matter begins July 1, 2022. Mr. Fridgen also noted there are currently no areas of drought in North Dakota; however, some areas are abnormally dry.

Mr. Preister updated the Board on recent meetings and activities of the RRBC. The RRBC is one of the partners of the 2022 Red River Basin tour and is also involved in the Lower Red River Regional Detention Study with the Corps of Engineers.

Rodger Olson updated the Board on the Metro Flood Diversion Project. The Red River Valley Alliance, the Public Private Partner for the project, will be commencing work on the Diversion Channel and Associated Infrastructure of the Metro Flood Diversion Project soon. Mr. Olson indicated there are many areas of the project under construction and advised everyone to please exercise caution near construction zones.

Meeting schedule

The next RRRA meeting will be rescheduled to September 7, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department in West Fargo, North Dakota.

Adjournment

There being no further business to be considered by the Board, the meeting adjourned without objection.

APPROVED:

Gary Thompson
Co-Chair

John Finney
Co-Chair

ATTEST:

Carol Harbeke Lewis
Secretary-Treasurer